(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item appered in the Hindustan Times dated 17th June, 1998 captioned "British Telecom's hidden agenda on South Asia Hub with VSNL".

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether the agreement has since been signed with British Telecom, and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) VSNL had floated an RFP (Request for proposal) to form a separate joint Venture Company exclusively for the purpose of becoming global player and also setting up of a regional hub in India for transmitting International Telecom Traffic terminating and originating outside India.

(c) No, Sir. The detailed business plans have been invited from the short listed parties.

Telephone facilities on Gram-Panchayats of North-Eastern States

2942. SHRI W. ANGOU SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Telephone connections released to the Gram Panchayats in the North-East States on State-wise basis;

(b) whether Government are aware of the fact that the Telephones are not installed in the Panchayat Offices;

(c) the number of Panchayat Offices where the telephone facilities are available directly at the offices in the State of Manipur;

(d) the steps taken by Government to give telephone connections directly to the Panchayat Offices;

(e) the number of Panchayat Offices where telephone facilities are not extended; and

(f) by when Government would be able to extend all the telephone facilities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) The number of Telephone connections provided in Gram Panchayats in the North East States, state-wise are as under:-

State	No. of Gram Panchayats	No. of Gram Panchayats covered with telephone facilities as on 31.3.1998
Assam	2485	2094
Arunachal Pradesh	944	386
Manipur	430	359
Meghalaya	450	415
Mizoram	613	419
Nagaland	1000	406
Tripura	910	547
Total	6832	4636

(b) to (d) As per the Departmental Policy, each village is to be provided with at least one Public Telephone which is denoted as Village Public Telephone (VPT). This VPT can be installed at any suitable place such as Grocery Shop, Post Office or Panchayat Bhavan. There is no policy of the Government to provide Telephone for the exclusive use of the Panchayat Offices.

359 VPTS in Manipur are installed for use of public in Panchayats at suitable places. As regards Nos. of the VPTs in Panchayat Bhavan, the information is being collected.

(e) The total number of Panchayats where the Telephone facilities are not extended are as under:

State	No. of Gran Panchayats where Telephone facility not extended
Assam	391
Arunachal Pradesh	558
Manipur	70
Meghalaya	35

State	No. of Gram Panchayats where Telephone facility not extended
Mizoram	184
Nagaland	595
Tripura	363
Total	2196

(f) The Telephone facilities in all the Villages are to be given by the end of Ninth Five Year Plan.

Vacant posts of CPMG and PMG in North-East States

2943. SHRI W. ANGOU SINGH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICTIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the post of Chief Post Master General and Post Master General of North-East Circle has been kept vacant;

(b) whether the post of Director Postal Service, Manipur has not been filled up regularly for more than four years despite assurance given by the Hon'ble Minister;

(c) what is the number of posts for Director Postal Services now lying vacant in the North-East States, State-wise; and

(d) the reasons for not filling up the vacant posts?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) No Sir. The posts of Chief Postmaster and Postmaster General in the North East Circle stand filled up.

(b) The post of Director Postal Services Manipur has been filled up by a regular incumbent since Oct. 1997.

(c) Four posts of Director Postal Services are lying vacant in the North-Eastern States — on each in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram and Dibrugarh.

(d) There is an overall shortage of offices at the level of Director Postal Services due to non-availability of eligible officers for posting.

Abrupt disconnections of STD facilities in Andhra Pradesh

2944. SHRI YERRA NARAYANSWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any representations has been received by the Andhra Pradesh Telecom on the sudden disconnections of STD facilities for public STD booth in Tadepalligudem and other town of West Godaveri in the month of June, 1998;

(b) the reasons for the abrupt disconnections of STD facilities;

(c) whether it is a fact that arbitrary actions are leading to public discomfort;

(d) whether any effort has been made by the Management to discuss with booth-operators the problems involved; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTHA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) The field officers in Tadepalligudem, during periodical checks, detected six PCOs which were showing irregular pulse rates and the booth operators were instructed to correct those. For correcting the same these STD PCOs were disconnected on 14.6.98 and restored on 15.6.98. The total duration of disconnections was less than 24 hrs. There was no arbitrary action and the disconnections was aimed at providing better service to the public at correct rates.

(d) Yes, Sir. Every effort is being taken to sort out the problems by discussing with Booth operators.

(e) Does not arise.